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ABSTRACT

Nearly 80 means-tested programs for low-income persons and families have been created by the federal government to help meet the needs of various groups. In fiscal year 1992, the federal government spent about $208 billion through these programs. Evaluation of these programs was based on reports by the General Accounting Office (GAO) and others. Most of the cost comes from the largest programs--Aid for Families with Dependent Children, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Supplementary Security Income, with additional means-tested aid going for housing and energy assistance, aid to veterans, and other means-tested programs. The study found that the means-tested programs can be costly and difficult to administer. They sometimes overlap one another or are so narrowly focused that they create gaps in services that hinder clients. The study also found that technology to run the programs is not being effectively developed and used and that many of these programs are inherently vulnerable to fraud, waste, and abuse. Finally, the study showed that the system is often difficult for clients to navigate and that, despite many years of experience with these programs, very little is known about how well they are working. (The report contains lists of estimated expenditures for various programs, a list of 29 GAO reports on related topics, and charts and tables showing participation in and expenditures for means-tested programs.) (KC)

United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Department Operations, Nutrition and Foreign Agriculture, Committee on Agriculture
House of Representatives

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# MEANS-TESTED PROGRAMS

## An Overview, Problems, and Issues

Statement of Jane L. Ross, Director,
Income Security Issues
Health, Education, and Human Services Division

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss the programs that compose the welfare system and the issues that warrant attention in the current reform effort. Over the years, nearly 80 means-tested programs for low-income individuals and families have been created to help meet the specific needs of various groups. In fiscal year 1992, the federal government spent about $208 billion through these programs to meet the needs of low-income Americans of all ages.

Means-tested programs are restricted to individuals or families whose income falls below defined levels and who meet certain other eligibility criteria established for each program. To qualify for assistance, applicants generally must show proof of income and other documentation, which administering agencies must then verify.

Certain means-tested programs, called entitlements, guarantee assistance to individuals or families as long as they meet the income and eligibility tests. The largest of these entitlement programs are Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), Medicaid, Food Stamps, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Other means-tested programs, such as housing and energy assistance programs, are nonentitlements. Nonentitlements do not guarantee assistance to all those who qualify. Instead, they provide qualified applicants support until appropriated funds are depleted.

You asked us to present an overview of the means-tested programs that compose the present welfare system, the amount of money spent on these programs, and the extent to which a typical family might be entitled to assistance and services. I will also describe some of the problems faced by administrators in managing these programs and by recipients in acquiring access to them. Finally, I will comment on what is known about the outcomes of these programs. My testimony is drawn from GAO's past work and other reports on the issues related to the programs within the welfare system. In deciding which programs to include in my testimony, we followed the subcommittee's suggestion that we discuss the programs addressed in the Congressional Research Service's (CRS) report on cash and noncash benefits for persons with limited income, dated September 1993.[1]

In brief, while there are about 80 means-tested programs, most of the federal cost comes from five programs. The many means-tested programs are costly and difficult to administer. On one hand, these programs sometimes overlap one another; on the other hand, they are often so narrowly focused that gaps in services

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[1]Cash and Noncash Benefits for Persons With Limited Income: Eligibility Rules, Recipient and Expenditure Data, FY 1990-92 (EPW-93-832), Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, September 15, 1993.

hinder clients. We note that although advanced computer technology is essential to efficiently running the programs, it is not being effectively developed or used. Due to their size and complexity, many of these programs are inherently vulnerable to fraud, waste, and abuse. We also point out that some of our work has shown that the welfare system is often difficult for clients to navigate. Finally, administrators have not articulated goals and objectives for some programs and have not collected data on how well the programs are working.

## OVERVIEW OF FEDERAL MEANS-TESTED PROGRAMS

Over the years, the Congress has established a set of cash and noncash benefit programs to assist low-income people. As you can see on our display (see attachment 1), in fiscal year 1992, the federal government provided about $208 billion in six areas of need for low-income people. When state dollars are included, the total amount of spending reached $290 billion.

The welfare system comprises about 80 programs, representing about 15 percent of total federal outlays in fiscal year 1992. Included in the system are the AFDC, Medicaid, SSI, and Food Stamp programs. These four means-tested programs accounted for 20 percent of the $700 billion spent in fiscal year 1993 on the 10 largest entitlement and mandatory spending programs. The system's nearly 80 programs target low-income individuals and families to meet two broad objectives: (1) to provide basic support and health care for those who are often unable to support themselves--the aged, blind, disabled, and children--and (2) to provide transitional assistance to able-bodied adults and their families while promoting self-sufficiency. Table 1 highlights the federal spending levels in some of the largest programs in each area.

Table 1: Selected Means-Tested Programs in Six Functional Areas

Dollars in billions

| Functional area/program | FY 1992 estimated expenditures |
|---|---|
| **Income support** | |
| Aid to Families With Dependent Children | $13.6 |
| Supplemental Security Income | 18.7 |
| Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) | 9.6 |
| **Medical care** | |
| Medicaid | 67.8 |
| Medical Care for Certain Veterans | 7.8 |
| **Food and nutrition** | |
| Food Stamps | 23.5 |
| School Lunch | 3.9 |
| Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) | 2.6 |
| School Breakfast | .8 |
| **Housing** | |
| Section 8 Housing Assistance | 12.3 |
| Low-Rent Public Housing | 5.0 |
| **Education and training** | |
| Stafford Loans and Pell Grants | 11.1 |
| Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) | 3.9 |
| Head Start | 2.2 |
| Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Training Program | .6 |
| **Other services** | |
| Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) | 2.8 |
| Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) | .8 |
| Child Care--AFDC, Transitional, and At-Risk | .8 |
| Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) | .4 |

Source: CRS, 1993.

## Providing Income Support

The federal government and states together spent more than $66 billion in fiscal year 1992 through 10 different programs that provided cash income to those considered in need of help, from poor mothers with children to certain veterans and refugees.[2] The federal government provided more than $48 billion of this total through its support of AFDC, SSI, and other cash assistance programs. Appendix I lists estimated expenditures for the nearly 80 means-tested assistance programs.

AFDC is one of the nation's largest welfare programs, and it lies at the heart of current reform proposals. AFDC was designed to help needy children deprived of support because of the continued absence, incapacity, or unemployment of a parent. Program support varies greatly among the states, with monthly benefits ranging from $120 in Mississippi to $923 in Alaska. States pay 46 percent of total AFDC costs. In fiscal year 1992, the federal government and states spent $25 billion to help about 14 million recipients in 5 million families. The federal government share was $13.6 billion. A vast majority of AFDC children live with one parent--usually their mother. In fact, in 1991, 53 percent of children receiving AFDC had parents who had never been married. As shown in figure 1, AFDC accounted for about 28 percent of federal spending on income support programs in fiscal year 1992.

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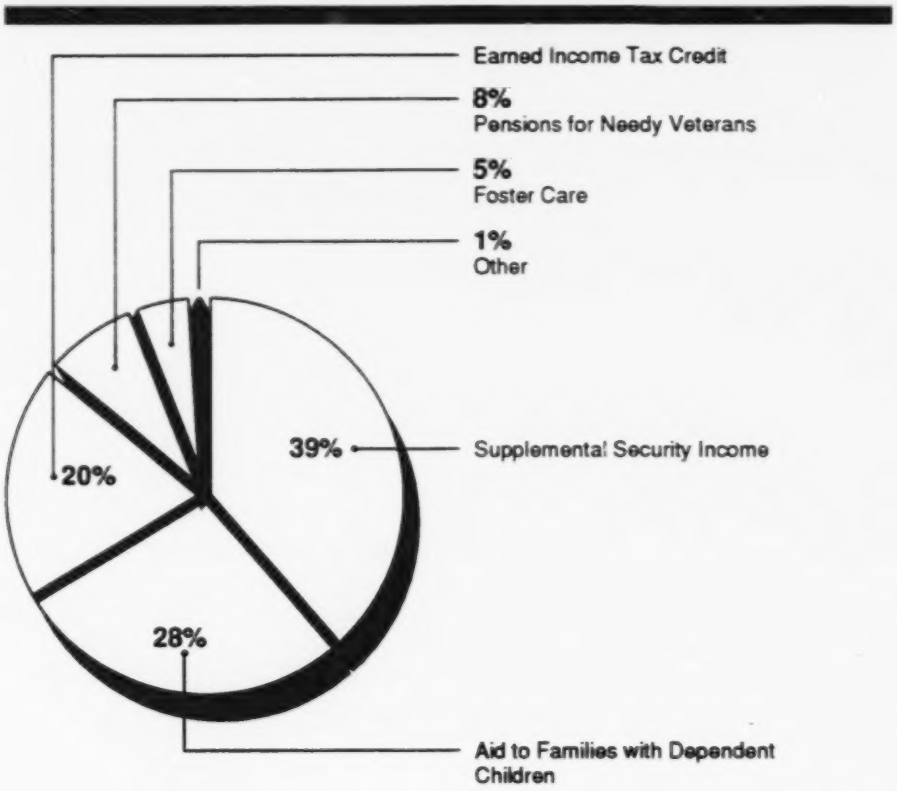
[2]Total expenditures and number of programs do not include the states' general assistance programs listed in appendix I, which receive no federal funds.

Figure 1: Percentages of Means-Tested Federal Income Support Spending by Program (Fiscal Year 1992)




Note: Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: GAO analysis based on CRS fiscal year 1992 data.

SSI is a primary source of cash income to aged, blind, or disabled individuals with low incomes and limited resources. The program follows uniform nationwide eligibility requirements and is mostly federally funded. In 1992, almost 6 million people received SSI benefits, and expenditures totaled almost $23 billion--about $19 billion of that in federal dollars.

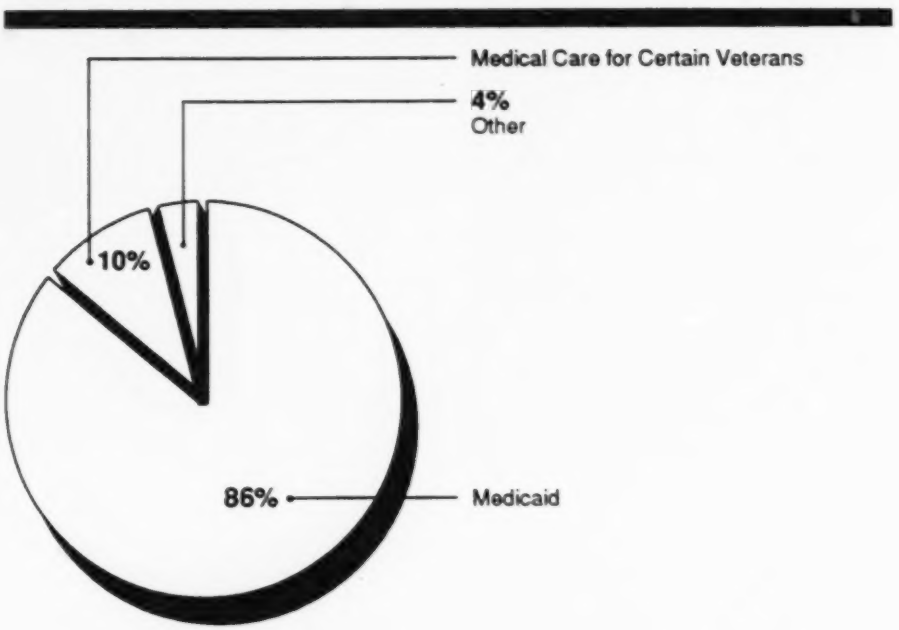
Other cash assistance programs range from pensions for needy veterans ($3.7 billion) to payments to Native Americans ($46 million). Included among these is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which supplements the earnings of working parents with low incomes. Almost 13.3 million families benefited from this tax credit in fiscal year 1992, at a federal cost of nearly $9.6 billion.

## Meeting Medical Needs

The federal government and states together provided about $129 billion through eight programs to assist low-income individuals with medical care in fiscal year 1992.[3] Federal spending accounted for about $78.5 billion of these expenditures, with the states responsible for the remainder. Five of the eight programs were totally federally funded, including those for Native American and migrant worker health services, at a cost of about $10 billion.

As shown in figure 2, the lion's share of these federal dollars--about 86 percent or $68 billion--is spent on the Medicaid program, for which states spent an additional $50 billion. This federal and state partnership pays for health care services for the aged, blind, and disabled (about 70 percent of expenditures) and for certain low-income people in families with children. As with AFDC, programs vary considerably among the states, which independently establish eligibility standards and covered services. In fiscal year 1992, the program covered 31 million people.

Figure 2: Percentages of Means-Tested Federal Medical Care Spending by Program (Fiscal Year 1992)




Source: GAO analysis based on CRS fiscal year 1992 data.

[3]Total expenditures and number of programs do not include the medical component of states' general assistance programs, which receive no federal funds.

The other programs in this category include medical care for certain veterans, Native Americans, certain refugees, and migrant workers. The Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant also falls under this category. Each of these smaller programs generally serves about a million or fewer individuals.

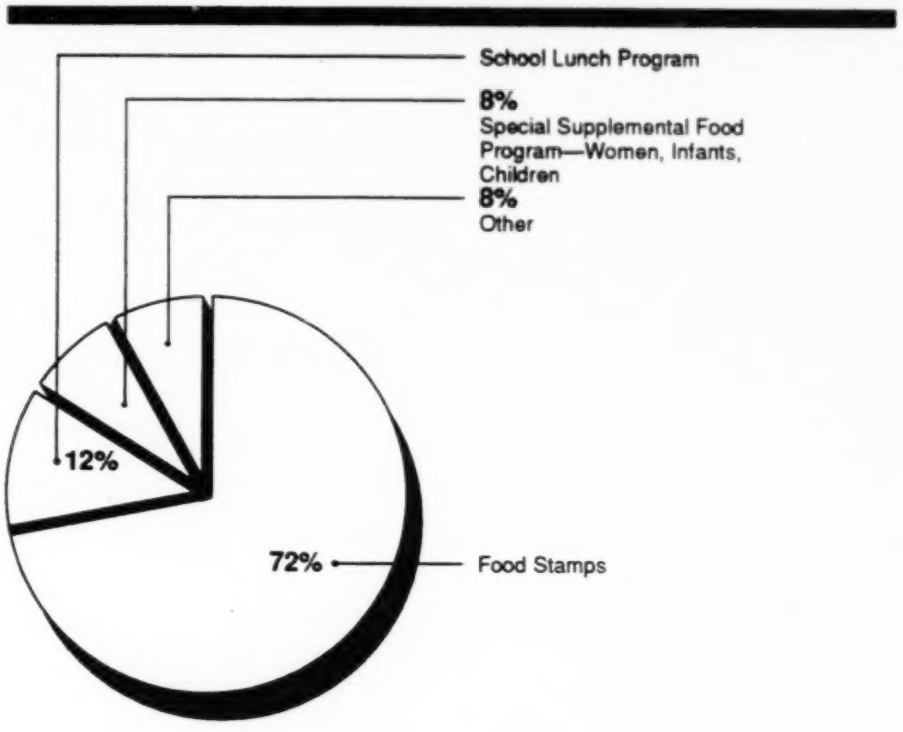
Ensuring Adequate Nutrition

The 11 programs providing food aid to low-income populations are almost entirely funded by the federal government. Programs range from those with general application to those focused on particular groups, such as the School Lunch and Breakfast programs and one for pregnant and parenting women. In fiscal year 1992, these nutrition programs totaled $34 billion, with $1.4 billion contributed by states.

As shown in figure 3, the Food Stamp program, by far the largest program in this category, is almost totally funded by federal dollars--$23.5 billion in fiscal year 1992.[4] The program was established in 1964 and expanded nationally in 1975, and eligibility requirements and benefit amounts are uniform nationwide. This program reached 27 million people a month in 1992; half were children and about 10 percent were elderly or disabled. About 20 percent of Food Stamp households include workers.

[4]States spent an additional $1.4 billion to administer this program.

Figure 3: Percentages of Means-Tested Federal Food and Nutrition Spending by Program (Fiscal Year 1992)



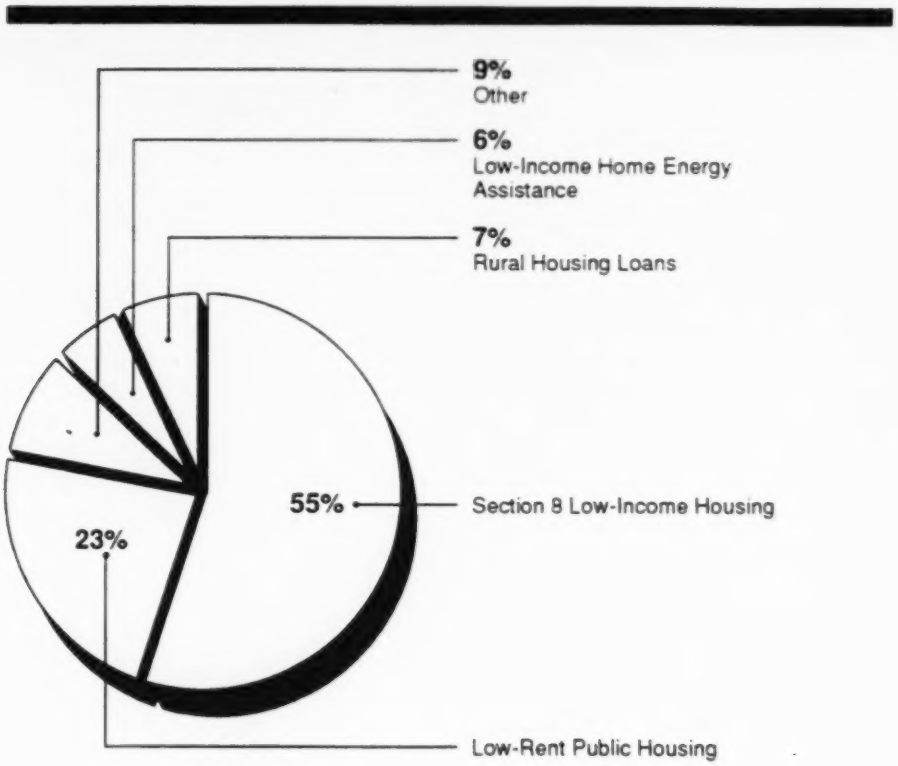

Source: GAO analysis based on CRS fiscal year 1992 data.

Other programs include the School Lunch program, which served 13 million low-income children a month at a cost of almost $4 billion in fiscal year 1992, and the School Breakfast program, which reached about 4.5 million children at a cost of about $780 million. An additional $2.6 billion was spent on the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which reached 5.4 million recipients each month of fiscal year 1992. Other programs serve the elderly, child care centers, and those in need of emergency food aid.

## Helping With Housing Needs

Sixteen programs are designed to meet the housing needs of low-income Americans. Some of these programs are targeted to particular areas or groups--such as, for rural or Native American housing needs. Expenditures for these programs totaled $22.2 billion in fiscal year 1992--all in federal dollars. The largest programs are shown in figure 4, along with their percentage share of funds spent on housing assistance.

Figure 4: Percentages of Means-Tested Federal Housing Assistance by Program (Fiscal Year 1992)




Source: GAO analysis based on CRS fiscal year 1992 data.

The Section 8 Low-Income Housing Assistance program, on which the federal government spent about $12 billion in 1992, cost more than double the cost of the next largest program--Low Rent Public Housing--at $5 billion. The Section 8 program provided assistance to almost three million families, while Public Housing reached another 1.4 million.

The other 14 programs are designed to meet a range of needs, including improving rural, Native American, and farm labor housing, and providing rental and interest reduction assistance. Two programs help individuals pay their home heating and cooling bills.

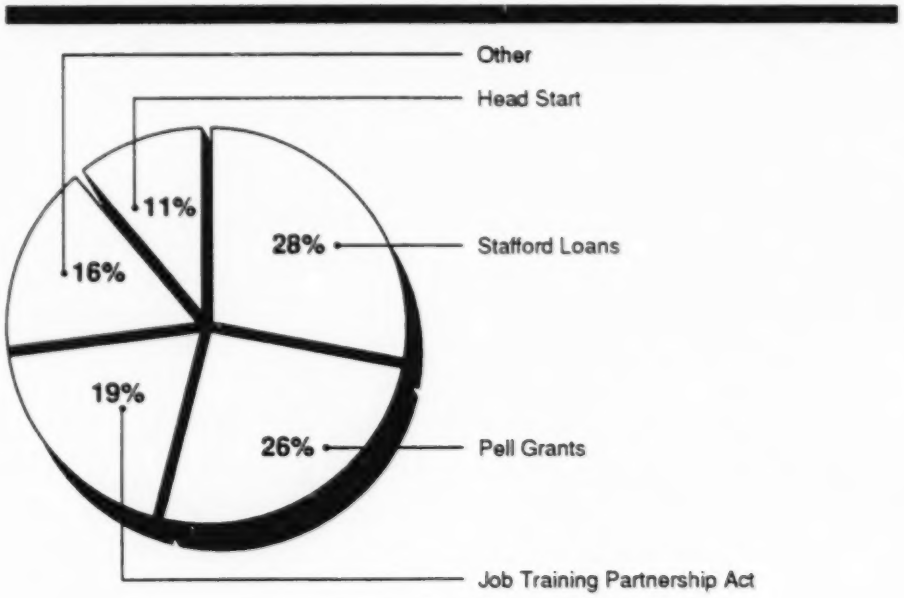
## Promoting Self-Sufficiency Through Education and Training

Twenty-three federal education and training programs help low-income individuals enhance their job skills and improve their chances for becoming or remaining self-sufficient. Accounting for

about $21 billion in mostly federal expenditures, the programs range from loans to college students to assistance targeted to migrant workers. States contribute about 5 percent of the funds expended.

The three most prominent education programs in this category are Stafford Loans ($5.7 billion in federal spending in fiscal year 1992), Pell Grants ($5.4 billion), and Head Start ($2.2 billion in federal spending augmented by $551 million from states). Figure 5 shows the percent of federal funds spent on education and training attributed to these programs. In fiscal year 1992, Stafford Loans and Pell Grants helped more than 9.4 million individuals attend college or training,[5] while Head Start helped about 621,000 disadvantaged preschoolers prepare themselves for entering elementary school.

Figure 5: Percentages of Means-Tested Federal Education and Training Spending by Program (Fiscal Year 1992)




Source: GAO analysis based on CRS fiscal year 1992 data.

[5]Although means tested, Stafford Loans may be given to families with appreciably higher incomes than most of the other programs.

Federal dollars also drive the training programs designed to help low-income individuals and families increase their ability to support themselves through work. The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) provided almost $4 billion in federal funds in fiscal year 1992 to help about 1.4 million disadvantaged adults and youth find jobs and increase their earnings capacity. Further, the federal government and states share the costs ($1 billion in fiscal year 1992) of the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program, which is dedicated to helping AFDC parents get jobs and assume responsibility for the support of their children.

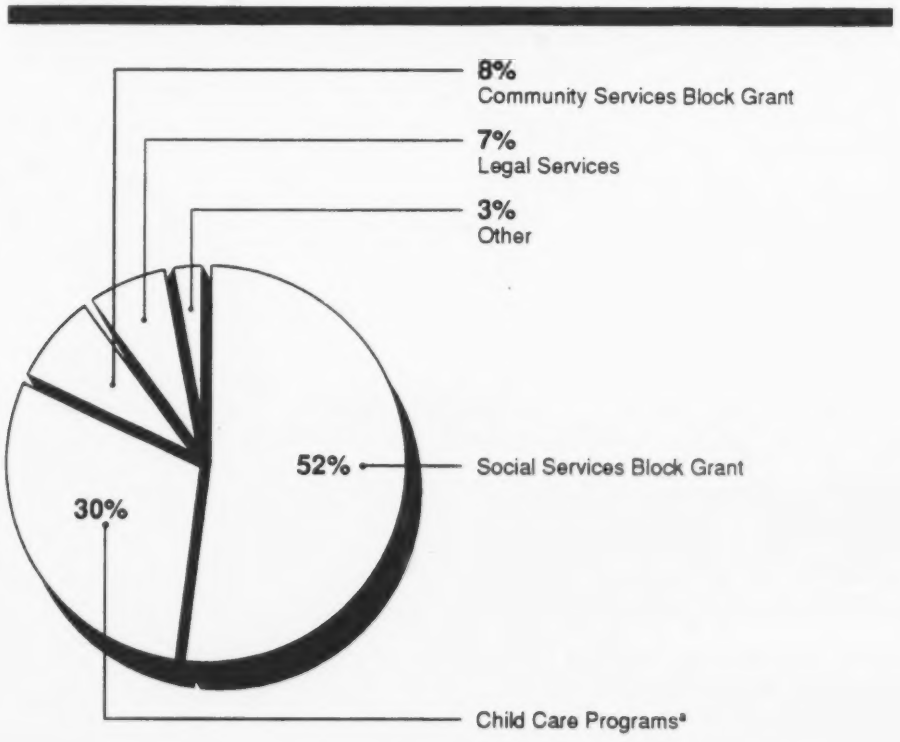
## Helping Individuals With Social Services Needs

Eight federal programs meet the various social services needs of low-income individuals, with most of the dollars distributed through block grants.[6] These federal and state dollars can be used to buy a broad range of services, including child care to help working families stay off welfare and legal services. The federal government contributed almost two-thirds of the $8.6 billion spent in this area in fiscal year 1992.

As shown in figure 6, the largest program--accounting for almost half of the social service program funds--is the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), or Title XX, which is used for such services as child care, assistance for the disabled, and child protective services. Also included under this category is the Community Services Block Grant, which supports various community-based antipoverty activities.

[6]Under block grants, states and localities have broad discretion to decide what specific programs to provide, as long as they are directly related to the goals of the grant program.

Figure 6: Percentages of Means-Tested Federal Spending for Other Services by Program (Fiscal Year 1992)




[a]Includes the Child Care and Development Block Grant, AFDC and Transitional Child Care, and At-Risk Child Care.

Source: GAO analysis based on CRS fiscal year 1992 data.

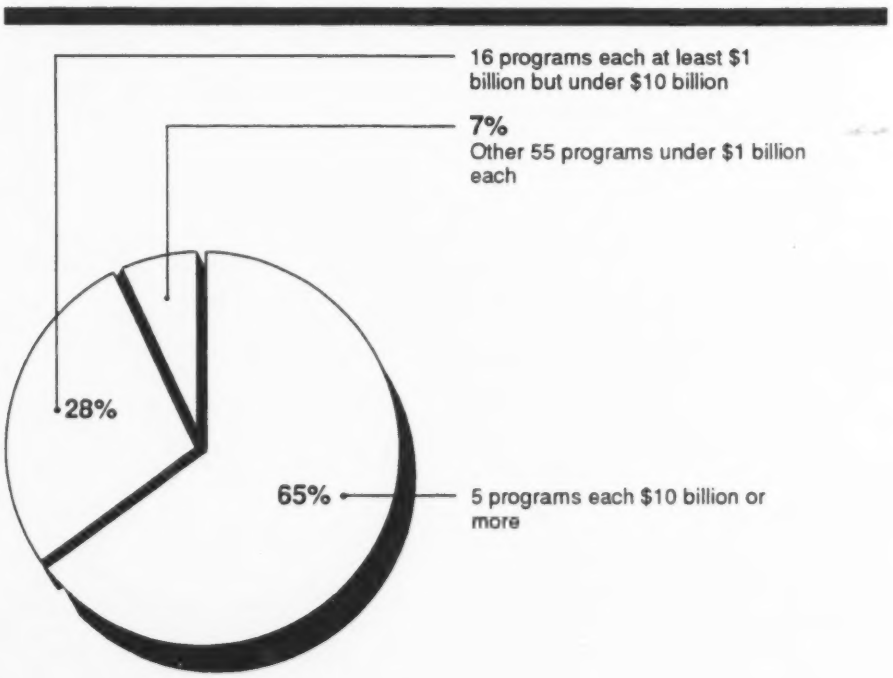
Four federal programs were designed specifically to help low-income families afford child care: the AFDC Child Care Program, the Transitional Child Care Program, At-Risk Child Care, and the Child Care and Development Block Grant. These child care programs cost $2.2 billion in fiscal year 1992, 73 percent of which was paid for by federal dollars.

## Federal Welfare Spending Driven by a Few Large Programs

The five largest means-tested programs--Medicaid, Food Stamps, AFDC, SSI, and Section 8 Housing Assistance--accounted for 65 percent of federal spending on low-income individuals in fiscal year 1992. Spending for these five programs, together with that for another 16 programs with expenditures of at least $1 billion each, made up about 93 percent of all federal means-tested dollars, as shown in figure 7. The remaining 55 programs accounted for only

7 percent, or $14 billion, of federal spending for low-income individuals.

Figure 7: Federal Expenditures on Selected Means-Tested Programs (Fiscal Year 1992)


16 programs each at least $1 billion but under $10 billion
7%
Other 55 programs under $1 billion each
28%
65%
5 programs each $10 billion or more

Source: GAO analysis based on CRS fiscal year 1992 data.

The major programs are the key to the growth in federal spending on low-income individuals. Federal spending for all means-tested programs grew from $39 billion in fiscal year 1975 to $208 billion in fiscal year 1992. In inflation-adjusted dollars, this represents a 106-percent increase. As shown on our display (see attachment 2), federal spending for Medicaid, Food Stamps, AFDC, SSI, and the two major housing programs--Section 8 Housing Assistance and Low-Rent Public Housing--combined increased from $61 billion in fiscal year 1975 to $155 billion in constant 1993 dollars, an increase of 154 percent. This growth was driven by a 300-percent increase in real Medicaid costs since 1975. In recent years, about 70 percent of Medicaid expenditures have assisted the aged, blind, and disabled.

## BENEFICIARIES RECEIVE ASSISTANCE FROM MULTIPLE PROGRAMS

Most beneficiaries of means-tested programs receive assistance from more than one program. The programs I have just described are administered by different federal and state agencies and have a variety of different eligibility requirements. In many cases, clients have to appear at various offices to apply for benefits and bring with them a variety of documentation. Although much of the basic documentation is the same, the eligibility rules are just different enough that it is not uncommon for an applicant to have to return once or twice more to complete the application and interview process.

Notwithstanding the difficulties in actually obtaining benefits, a low-income family that qualifies for one of the cash assistance programs is typically eligible for other noncash programs. The following table shows the percentages of households in the AFDC and SSI programs that received benefits in 1992 from multiple programs.

Table 2: Multiple Program Participation, 1992

| | Percent of Households Receiving-- | |
|---|---|---|
| | AFDC | SSI |
| Who Are Also Receiving-- | | |
| Medicaid | 96 | 100 |
| Food Stamps | 86 | 46 |
| Public or subsidized rental housing | 30 | 24 |
| Total households (in thousands) | 4,057 | 3,957 |

Source: Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives, Overview of Entitlement Programs: 1994 Green Book, July 15, 1994.

As table 2 shows, for example, more than 4 million households were receiving AFDC in 1992. About 96 percent of these were also receiving Medicaid, 86 percent were receiving food stamps, and 30 percent were receiving assisted housing benefits. Further, as you can see in the table, SSI recipients typically received Medicaid

and often received food stamps in addition to their cash assistance. We should note that because the cash assistance, Medicaid, and Food Stamp programs are related entitlements, when there is caseload growth in AFDC or SSI, the Medicaid and Food Stamp caseloads also increase.

An Illustration: Benefits for a Mother and Two Children

To help understand what a benefit package might consist of for a low-income family, consider a typical mother with two children receiving AFDC. In January 1992, her median cash benefit would have been about $372 per month. This AFDC mother would also be eligible for noncash benefits, such as Medicaid. However, as with AFDC, states are free to design and administer their Medicaid programs as long as they adhere to federal guidelines. As a result, the types and scope of benefits offered, and the amounts paid for services, vary considerably from state to state. The mother would have also qualified for about $275 worth of food stamps per month.

Unlike AFDC, Medicaid, and Food Stamps, which are entitlements, funding for housing assistance is limited. In 1992, about 30 percent of AFDC families received public or subsidized rental housing assistance.

In addition to these four major assistance programs, the typical AFDC family may be eligible for several other programs and services. The mother may volunteer, or in some instances be required, to attend school or training, paid for through a federal training program. She may also receive child care assistance so that she can attend training, school, or work. Further, the family could receive other benefits, such as school breakfasts and lunches, cash assistance to pay energy bills, and additional food assistance for pregnant mothers under the WIC program. Our display (see attachment 3) shows all of the means-tested programs, as well as those that may be available to this family.

Efforts are being made at the state and local levels to simplify and coordinate the network of federal public assistance programs. But doing this takes considerable time and resources and requires pulling together multiple federal funding streams while continuing to meet myriad federal rules and regulations.

Our display (see attachment 4)illustrates how complex the current system can be for a mother with two children applying for benefits and services. For cash assistance, she often has to furnish basic documentation and evidence to multiple offices, and each office may require slightly different information. She probably has to go to different offices to obtain housing assistance, additional nutrition program benefits, child care assistance, and job training. These offices frequently are located

in different parts of the city, which may require the family to take public transportation back and forth across town.

## PROGRAMS ARE COSTLY AND DIFFICULT TO RUN

I would now like to turn my attention to some of the enormous challenges that federal, state, and local program officials face as they attempt to administer these programs efficiently and equitably. At least 28 federal departments and agencies, and untold numbers at the state and local levels, are responsible for administering and overseeing these means-tested programs. To ensure that benefits are correctly awarded, these entities employ countless numbers of individuals to perform various functions, including client intake, income and eligibility determination and redetermination, and quality control review.

Intake workers evaluate the application and other required documentation, such as income statements, proof of citizenship, and birth certificates for each family member. Other staff follow the often numerous rules and requirements to determine eligibility and level of benefits. Still others verify the eligibility decisions. And still others conduct processing and support functions.

To understand the administrative resources devoted to these programs, consider the operating costs for some of the largest. The SSI program is difficult to administer because it must determine the economic status of the applicant, in addition to the nature and severity of his or her disability. The Social Security Administration (SSA) employs more than 21,000 people nationwide to run the SSI program. States and the federal government also spent $2.6 billion in fiscal year 1992 to operate the AFDC program. Further, in 1992, states and the federal government spent about $4.3 billion, or 3.5 percent of total outlays, to operate Medicaid. Finally, in 1993, the federal government and states spent more than $3 billion to administer the Food Stamp program--much of which is directed toward policing activities.

The administrative burden associated with processing applications and determining eligibility does not stop with program staff. The clients whom welfare programs are designed to help often express frustration about the arduous and complex process involved in applying for benefits. Some clients have so much difficulty completing the application process that they give up and never receive the help for which they may be entitled.

## PROGRAMS OVERLAP AND ARE FRAGMENTED

As a result of the growth in welfare programs over time, many overlap, adding unnecessary administrative costs at each level of government. For example, we identified nine employment training programs that frequently target the same clients, share the same

goals, and provide similar services.[7] These programs are administered by five different federal departments. These separate bureaucracies at the federal level are often duplicated at the state and local levels, raising questions about the efficiency of the employment training system.

Other programs are so narrowly focused that some groups targeted for services fall through the cracks. Take child care, for example. The Congress created four child care programs to help low-income mothers support themselves and their families. But, the fragmented nature of these programs--with entitlements to some client categories, time limits on others, and activity limits on still others--produces service gaps for mothers trying to work. For example, a mother who is receiving child care assistance is at risk of losing it if she gets laid off because certain child care programs cannot be used for a mother looking for work.

## FEDERAL FUNDING ENCOURAGES STATE AUTOMATION, BUT NOT INNOVATION

Because of their complexity, costs, and large caseloads, welfare programs work much more efficiently when they employ sound technology. Recognizing this fact, the Congress has authorized federal funding participation, at rates ranging from 50 to 90 percent, to encourage and support state development and operation of automated information systems for major welfare programs, including AFDC, Child Support Enforcement, Child Care, Child Welfare/Foster Care, JOBS, Food Stamp, and Medicaid. Through fiscal year 1992, the federal contribution totaled more than $8.6 billion.[8] For fiscal years 1993 through 1999, the states estimate they will spend another $10.7 billion to develop and operate such systems with the federal government paying over half of this cost.

Despite these sizable investments, the states cannot, with current program rules, use technology to its full advantage. Faced with barriers such as diverse and sometimes contradictory program requirements, separate funding provisions, statutory deadlines, and inadequate federal monitoring, states have developed essentially separate automated systems for each program. The difficulty in surmounting these barriers leaves states little opportunity or incentive for reexamining and, if necessary, reengineering their existing processes. As a result, manual processes are often electronically embedded in the automated systems, and the systems rarely automate processes or incorporate features that could substantially streamline the work of supporting the welfare system.

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[7]Multiple Employment Training Programs: Overlap Among Programs Raises Questions About Efficiency (GAO/HEHS-94-193, July 11, 1994).

[8]All historical and projected costs expressed in 1993 constant dollars.

Federal agencies are undertaking initiatives to help states develop more efficient and effective automated welfare systems. Examples of such actions include funding the consolidation of separate AFDC, Medicaid, and Food Stamp eligibility systems into integrated Family Assistance Management Information Systems and developing model systems for the Child Welfare and JOBS programs.

States such as Connecticut, Minnesota, Rhode Island, and Texas have focused on integrating their automated welfare systems and streamlining welfare program processes. For example, Connecticut has a project under way to provide an integrated set of services in one location. The system has increased caseworker productivity, decreased error rates as compared to those that occur with manual processing, improved fraud detection, and helped identify overpayment.

## PROGRAMS ARE VULNERABLE TO FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE

In addition to the challenges involved in efficiently running the programs and delivering their services, these programs are inherently vulnerable to fraud, waste, and abuse. Given their size and structure, these programs are subject to billions of dollars in incorrect payments and services annually as a result of fraudulent eligibility and benefit claims, applicant errors, and processing errors. For example, in fiscal year 1993, nearly $1.8 billion in overpayments was estimated to have been made in the Food Stamp program alone. The means-tested nature of these programs creates further program vulnerabilities. For example, the need to collect, review, maintain, and verify enormous amounts of documentation to ensure accurate and equitable decisions leaves these programs open to fraud and abuse.

In 1993, we reported that prescription drug diversion and other fraudulent billings had been an ongoing problem in the Medicaid program for at least the previous decade.[9] We found that physicians, clinic owners, and pharmacists collude to defraud Medicaid by billing for services not rendered or needed and by prescribing and distributing drugs mainly to obtain reimbursement. Patients are often knowing participants in these schemes, allowing use of their Medicaid recipient numbers for billing purposes in exchange for cash, drugs, or other inducements.

In January 1994, California estimated that hundreds of millions of dollars were being wasted through fraud in its public assistance programs. In its AFDC program alone, about 4 percent of cases randomly selected for quality control review in 1992 and 1993 were estimated to involve fraud. Many regard this 4 percent as a

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[9]Medicaid Drug Fraud: Federal Leadership Needed to Reduce Program Vulnerabilities (GAO/HRD-93-118, Aug. 2, 1993).

low estimate, because quality control reviewers did not have the information in their files necessary to identify all types of potential fraud.

Finally, in a 1994 study of fraud, waste, and abuse in the Food Stamp program,[10] we reported four common problems that exist with the current coupon-based system: (1) overpayments that occur during the eligibility and benefit determination process, (2) illegal use of benefits after they are issued, (3) counterfeiting of food stamps, and (4) theft of coupons from the mail. As you know, there are various alternatives being proposed to replace the current system for delivering benefits.

## LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT PROGRESS MADE IN SOME PROGRAMS

In addition to the costs of and growth in these programs and problems with overlap and fragmentation, there is also increasing concern on how well the programs within the welfare system are serving recipients. There is also a fundamental concern about whether the programs are achieving their goals. For many programs, pertinent data are not being collected on how recipients fare. Also, as we have found in our prior work, many programs do not articulate specific and measurable policy goals that should be achieved.

To illustrate, in 1994, we reported that most federal agencies do not know whether their employment training programs are working effectively.[11] One of the largest of these programs--JOBS--is designed specifically to provide AFDC recipients with the help they need to avoid long-term dependence. Nearly $8 billion in federal and state funds have been spent on this program since state and local governments began operating their programs in 1989. To date, the Department of Health and Human Services does not know whether JOBS participants are becoming self-sufficient because it does not gather enough information on critical program outcomes, such as the number of participants entering employment and leaving AFDC annually.

Similarly, in 1993, we reported that the United States Department of Agriculture's multiple food assistance programs have evolved separately over the past 46 years without the benefit of a

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[10]Food Assistance: Potential Impacts of Alternative Systems for Delivering Food Stamp Program Benefits (GAO/RCED-95-13, Dec. 16, 1994).

[11]Multiple Employment Training Programs: Most Federal Agencies Do Not Know If Their Programs Are Working Effectively (GAO/HEHS-94-88, Mar. 2, 1994).

comprehensive, overarching federal food assistance policy.[12] These programs operate under their own set of objectives that were created in response to an array of perceived needs. Most regional Food and Consumer Services and state agency officials whom we contacted were unable to describe how individual food assistance programs contributed toward the overall food assistance effort. Without a goal stated in objective, quantifiable, and measurable terms, assessing the overall impact of the food assistance effort in meeting the needs of the poor is difficult. It might be that a different combination of programs would more effectively serve the nutritional needs of clients.

SUMMARY

The nearly 80 means-tested programs that compose the welfare system accounted for about 15 percent of all federal spending in fiscal year 1992. The largest assistance programs, which are all entitlements--AFDC, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and SSI--accounted for 60 percent of all federal spending on low-income individuals and families in that year. Because the cash assistance programs (AFDC and SSI), Food Stamp program, and Medicaid are related entitlements, when there is caseload growth in AFDC or SSI, the Medicaid and Food Stamp caseloads also increase.

Our work has shown that these means-tested programs can be costly and difficult to administer. They sometimes overlap one another or are so narrowly focused that they create gaps in services that hinder clients. Further, we found that technology to run the programs is not being effectively developed and used and that many of these programs are inherently vulnerable to fraud, waste, and abuse. Finally, some of our work has shown that the system is often difficult for clients to navigate and that, despite many years of experience with these programs, very little is known about how well they are working.

- - - - -

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. At this time, I will be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

For more information on this testimony, please call David P. Bixler, Assistant Director, at (202) 512-7201 or Gale C. Harris, Senior Evaluator, at (202) 512-7235.

[12] Food Assistance: USDA's Multiprogram Approach (GAO/RCED-94-33, Nov. 29, 1993).

## ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES FOR MEANS-TESTED PROGRAMS FOR FISCAL YEAR 1992

This appendix shows federal, state, and total estimated expenditures and the number of people or households reached by means-tested programs. We have used the data reported in the Congressional Research Service's Cash and Noncash Benefits for Persons With Limited Income: Eligibility Rules, Recipient and Expenditure Data, FY 1990-92, dated September 1993. The fiscal year 1992 data in the CRS report and this appendix represent the most recent data available for the complete set of means-tested programs identified. The dollar amounts included were based on expenditures where available; appropriated and obligated amounts were also used. For those programs that reached other than low-income individuals, CRS estimated the portion of expenditures used by those with limited incomes. In this appendix, programs are listed in descending order of federal expenditures. Except for sums below $100 million, figures are rounded to the nearest million. Totals reflect rounding of smaller sums to the nearest million. "N.A." means not available.

Also note that the way the number of recipients was measured varied by spending category. For example, for income support, medical care, food and nutrition, and training programs, the average monthly number of recipients was generally used. For housing assistance, the number of families, dwelling units, or households during the year was used. In addition, for education and other services, the annual number of recipients was shown.

## ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES FOR MEANS-TESTED ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
Fiscal Year 1992

Dollars in millions

| Benefit category/program | Estimated expenditures | | | Estimated recipients (thousands) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Federal | State | Total | |
| **Income support** | | | | **Average monthly recipients** |
| Aid to Families with Dependent Children | $13,569 | $11,354 | $24,923 | 13,754[a] |
| Supplemental Security Income | 18,744 | 4,030 | 22,774 | 5,559[b] |
| Earned Income Tax Credit | 9,553 | 0 | 9,553 | 39,909 |
| Pensions for needy veterans, their dependents, and survivors | 3,667 | 0 | 3,667 | 969 |
| Foster Care | 2,233 | 1,937 | 4,170 | 202 |
| General assistance (nonmedical care component) | 0 | 3,340 | 3,340 | 1,205 |
| Adoption assistance | 221 | 181 | 402 | 66.2 |
| Assistance to refugees and Cuban/Haitian entrants (cash components) | 139 | 0 | 139 | 31.3 |
| Emergency assistance | 134 | 134 | 268 | 158.7[c] |
| Dependency and indemnity compensation and death compensation for parents of veterans | 68 | 0 | 68 | 34.1 |
| General assistance to Indians | 45.9 | 0 | 45.9 | 41.1 |
| **Income support total** | $48,374 | $20,976 | $69,350 | [d] |
| **Medical care** | | | | **Average monthly recipients** |
| Medicaid | 67,827 | 50,240 | 118,067 | 30,776[b] |
| Medical care for veterans without service-connected disability | 7,838 | N.A. | 7,838 | 580[e] |
| General assistance (medical care component) | 0 | 4,850 | 4,850 | N.A. |
| Indian Health Services | 1,431 | 0 | 1,431 | 1,160[b] |

| Benefit category/program | Estimated expenditures | | | Estimated recipients (thousands) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Federal | State | Total | |
| Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant | $646 | $413 | $1,059 | N.A. |
| Community Health Centers | 537 | 0 | 537 | 5,675[b] |
| Title X Family Planning Services | 150 | N.A. | 150 | 4,000[b] |
| Migrant Health Centers | 57.6 | 0 | 57.6 | 545[b] |
| Medical assistance to refugees and Cuban/Haitian entrants | 42.4 | 0 | 42.4 | 43.5 |
| **Medical care total** | $78,529 | $55,503 | $133,032 | [d] |
| **Food and nutrition** | | | | **Average monthly recipients** |
| Food Stamps | 23,540 | 1,378 | 24,918 | 26,900 |
| School Lunch Program (free and reduced-price segments) | 3,895 | N.A. | 3,895 | 13,000 |
| Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children | 2,600 | N.A. | 2,600 | 5,400 |
| School Breakfast Program (free and reduced price segments) | 782 | N.A. | 782 | 4,500 |
| Child and Adult Care Food Program | 624 | N.A. | 624 | 1,019 |
| Nutrition Program for the Elderly (no income test, but preferences for those with greatest economic or social needs) | 591 | 68.1 | 659.1 | 3,349[b] |
| The Emergency Food Assistance Program | 250 | N.A. | 250 | 7,500[c] |
| Summer Food Service Program for Children | 203 | N.A. | 203 | 1,919 |
| Commodity Supplemental Food Program | 90 | N.A. | 90 | 343 |
| Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations | 84 | N.A. | 84 | 119 |
| Special Milk Program (free segment) | 1.7 | N.A. | 1.7 | 60 |
| **Food and nutrition total** | $32,661 | $1,446 | $34,107 | [d] |

| Benefit category/program | Estimated expenditures Federal | State | Total | Estimated recipients (thousands) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Housing** | | | | **Families or units during the year** |
| Section 8 Low-Income Housing Assistance | $12,307 | $0 | $12,307 | 2,797[f] |
| Low-Rent Public Housing | 5,008 | N.A. | 5,008 | 1,409[f] |
| Low-Income Home Energy Assistance | 1,500 | 94 | 1,594 | 6,200 |
| Rural Housing Loans | 1,468 | 0 | 1,468 | 25.7 |
| Section 236 Interest Reduction Payments | 652 | 0 | 652 | 510.6[f] |
| Rural Rental Housing Loans | 573 | 0 | 573 | 15 |
| Rural Rental Assistance | 320 | 0 | 320 | 29.4[f] |
| Weatherization Assistance | 174 | N.A. | 174 | 87 |
| Section 101 Rent Supplements | 54 | 0 | 54 | 20[f] |
| Section 235 Homeownership Assistance | 45 | 0 | 45 | 98[f] |
| Farm Labor Housing Loans and Grants | 28.7 | 0 | 28.7 | 0.6 |
| Rural Housing Repair Loans and Grants | 24.1 | 0 | 24.1 | 5.3[g] |
| Rural Housing Preservation Grants | 23 | 0 | 23 | 4.0 |
| Indian Housing Improvement Grants | 20.1 | 0 | 20.1 | 1.2[f] |
| Rural Self-Help Technical Assistance Grants and Site Loans | 9 | 0 | 9 | 50[f] |
| Home Investment Partnerships | 2.7 | -- | 2.7 | 182 |
| **Housing total** | $22,209 | $94 | $22,303 | [d] |

| Benefit category/program | Estimated expenditures | | | Estimated recipients (thousands) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Federal | State | Total | |
| **Education and training** | | | | **Number of recipients**[13] |
| Stafford Loans | $ 5,683 | $ 0 | $5,683 | 5,135 |
| Pell Grants | 5,374 | 0 | 5,374 | 4,259 |
| Head Start | 2,202 | 551 | 2,753 | 621 |
| College Work-Study Program | 595 | 0 | 595 | 827 |
| Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants | 520 | 0 | 520 | 835 |
| Federal TRIO Programs | 385 | 0 | 385 | 649 |
| Chapter 1 Migrant Education Program | 308 | N.A. | 308 | 417 |
| Perkins Loans | 156 | 0 | 156 | 688 |
| State Student Incentive Grant Programs | 63.5 | 63.5 | 127 | 213 |
| Fellowships for Graduate and Professional Study | 62.8 | 0 | 62.8 | 5.8 |
| Health Professions Student Loans and Scholarships | 48.3 | 0 | 48.3 | 33.9 |
| Follow Through | 8.6 | N.A. | 8.6 | N.A. |
| Migrant High School Equivalency Program | 8.3 | N.A. | 8.3 | 3.5 |
| Eilender Fellowships | 4.3 | 0 | 4.3 | 6.3 |
| College Assistance Migrant Program | 2.3 | 0 | 2.3 | 0.4 |
| Child Development Associate Scholarships | 1.4 | 0 | 1.4 | 5 |
| **Education subtotal** | $15,423 | $614 | $16,037 | [d] |
| Training for Disadvantaged Adults and Youth | 1,774 | 0 | 1,774 | 602.3 |
| Summer Youth Employment and Training Program | 1,183 | 0 | 1,183 | 783 |

[13]For educational programs--annual number of recipients. For training programs--average monthly number of recipients.

APPENDIX I

| Benefit category/program | Estimated expenditures | | | Estimated recipients (thousands) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Federal | State | Total | |
| Job Corps | $955 | $0 | $955 | 64.9 |
| Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program | 623 | 387 | 1,010 | 510 |
| Senior Community Service Employment Program | 395 | 43.9 | 438.9 | 65.2 |
| Foster Grandparents | 65.6 | 29 | 94.6 | 23.4 |
| Senior Companions | 28.7 | 16.1 | 44.8 | 11.9 |
| **Training subtotal** | 5,024 | 476 | 5,500 | [d] |
| **Education and training total** | $20,447 | $1,090 | $21,537 | [d] |
| **Services** | | | | **Annual number of recipients** |
| Social Services Block Grant (Title XX) | 2,800 | 2,619 | 5,419 | N/A |
| Child Care and Development Block Grant | 825 | 0 | 825 | 570[a] |
| AFDC and Transitional Child Care | 438 | 317 | 755 | 265[a] |
| "At Risk" Child Care (to avert AFDC eligibility) | 335 | 269 | 604 | N.A. |
| Community Services Block Grant | 438 | 0 | 438 | N.A. |
| Legal Services | 350 | 0 | 350 | N.A. |
| Emergency Food and Shelter program | 134 | N.A. | 134 | N.A. |
| Social Services for Refugees and Cuban/Haitian Entrants | 25.8 | 0 | 25.8 | 339.8 |
| **Services total** | $5,346 | $3,205 | $8,551 | [d] |
| **Grand total** | $207,566 | $82,314 | $288,880 | [d] |

Notes:

[a]Children and/or parents.
[b]Annual number.
[c]Families or households.

[d]Because of overlap, and in some cases because of mixture of monthly and annual numbers and mixture of dwelling units, loans, grants, children, families, and households, recipient totals are not shown.
[e]Annual number of episodes.
[f]Units.
[g]Loans and grants.

Source: Cash and Noncash Benefits for Persons With Limited Income: Eligibility Rules, Recipient and Expenditure Data, FY 1990-92 (EPW-93-832), Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, September 15, 1993.

## RELATED GAO PRODUCTS

### INCOME SUPPORT

Low-Income Families: Comparison of Incomes of AFDC and Working Poor Families (GAO/T-HEHS-95-63, Jan. 25, 1995).

Welfare to Work: Current AFDC Program Not Sufficiently Focused on Employment (GAO/HEHS-95-28, Dec. 19, 1994).

Child Welfare: HHS Begins to Assume Leadership to Implement National and State Systems (GAO/AIMD-94-37, June 8, 1994).

Welfare to Work: JOBS Participation Rate Data Unreliable for Assessing States' Performance (GAO/HRD-93-73, May 5, 1993).

Earned Income Tax Credit: Effectiveness of Design and Administration (GAO/T-GGD-93-20, Mar. 30, 1993).

### MEDICAL CARE

Medicaid: A Program Highly Vulnerable to Fraud (GAO/T-HEHS-94-106, Feb. 25, 1994).

Medicaid: Alternatives for Improving the Distribution of Funds to States (GAO/HRD-93-112FS, Aug. 20, 1993).

Medicaid Drug Fraud: Federal Leadership Needed to Reduce Program Vulnerabilities (GAO/HRD-93-118, Aug. 2, 1993); testimony on same topic (GAO/T-HRD-93-28, Aug. 2, 1993).

Medicaid: Data Improvements Needed to Help Manage Health Care Program (GAO/IMTEC-93-18, May 13, 1993).

Medicaid: States Turn to Managed Care to Improve Access and Control Costs (GAO/HRD-93-46, March 17, 1993); testimony on same topic (GAO/T-HRD-93-10, March 17, 1993).

### FOOD AND NUTRITION

Food Assistance: Potential Impacts of Alternative Systems for Delivering Food Stamp Program Benefits (GAO/RCED-95-13, Dec. 16, 1994).

Food Assistance: Information on Meal Costs in the National School Lunch Program (GAO/RCED-94-32BR, Dec. 1, 1993).

Food Assistance: USDA's Multiprogram Approach (GAO/RCED-94-33, Nov. 24, 1993).

Food Stamp Program Provisions (GAO/RCED-93-70R, Nov. 25, 1992).

HOUSING

Housing and Urban Development: Major Management and Budget Issues (GAO/T-RCED-95-89, Jan. 24, 1995).

Federally Assisted Housing: Conditions of Some Properties Receiving Section 8 Project-Based Assistance Is Below Housing Quality Standards (GAO/T-RCED-94-273, July 26, 1994).

Public Housing: Information on Backlogged Modernization Funds (GAO/RCED-94-217FS, July 15, 1994).

Multifamily Housing: Status of HUD's Multifamily Loan Portfolio (GAO/RCED-94-173FS, Apr. 12, 1994).

Public Housing: Low-Income Housing Tax Credit as an Alternative Development Method (GAO/RCED-93-31, July 16, 1993).

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Multiple Employment Training Programs: Major Overhaul Needed to Reduce Costs, Streamline the Bureaucracy, and Improve Results (GAO/T-HEHS-95-53, Jan. 10, 1995).

JOBS and JTPA: Tracking Spending Outcomes and Program Performance (GAO/HEHS-94-177, Jul. 15, 1994).

Multiple Employment Training Programs: Overlap Among Programs Raises Questions About Efficiency (GAO/HEHS-94-193, Jul. 11, 1994).

Multiple Employment Training Programs: Conflicting Requirements Underscore Need for Change (GAO/T-HEHS-94-120, May 10, 1994).

Multiple Employment Training Programs: Most Federal Agencies Do Not Know If Their Programs Are Working Effectively (GAO/HEHS-94-88, Mar. 2, 1994).

SERVICES

Child Care: Narrow Subsidy Programs Create Problems for Mothers Trying to Work (GAO/T-HEHS-95-69, Jan. 31, 1995).

Child Care: Child Care Subsidies Increase Likelihood That Low-Income Mothers Will Work (GAO/HEHS-95-20, Dec. 30, 1994).

Child Care: Promoting Quality in Family Child Care (GAO/HEHS-95-36, Dec. 7, 1994).

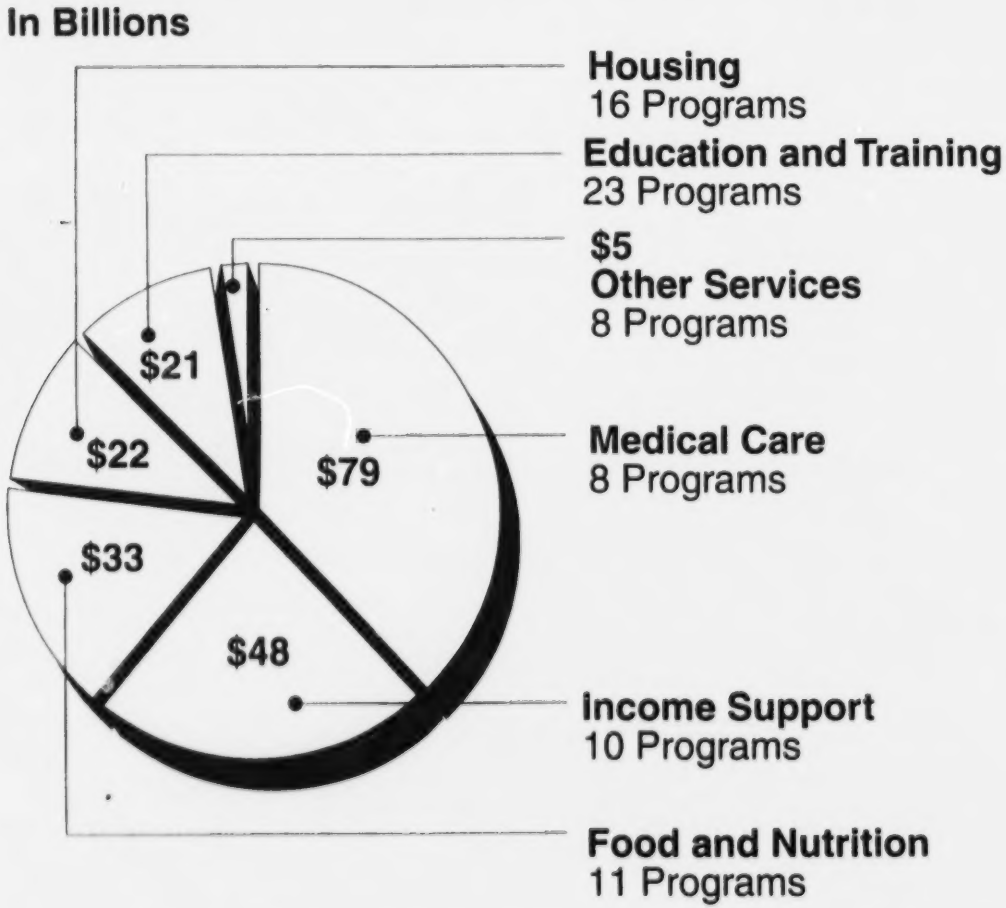
Child Care: Current System Could Undermine Goals of Welfare Reform (GAO/T-HEHS-94-238, Sept. 20, 1994).

Child Care: Working Poor and Welfare Recipients Face Service Gaps (GAO/HEHS-94-87, May 13, 1994).

(105405)

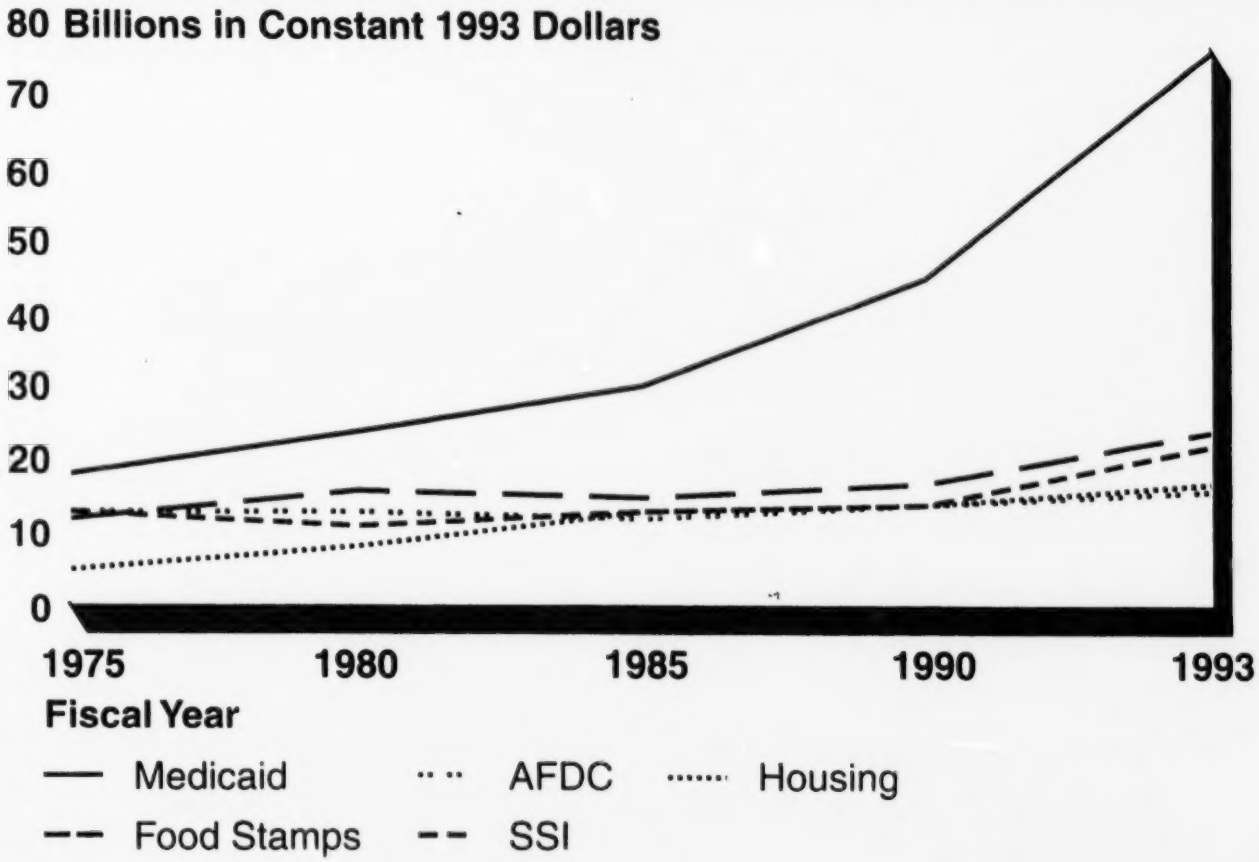
ATTACHMENT 1

# GAO Federal Assistance to Low-Income Individuals by Function (FY 1992)



ATTACHMENT 2

# GAO Federal Expenditures for Major Means-Tested Programs



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ATTACHMENT 3

# GAO AFDC Families Program Eligibility

| | Programs | Generally Eligible and Entitled to Benefits | Generally Eligible, But Availability of Benefits Limited | Eligibility and Availability of Benefits Limited | Generally Not Eligible |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Income Support | AFDC | ● | | | |
| | SSI | | | | ● |
| | Earned Income Tax Credit | | | ● | |
| | Pensions for Needy Veterans | | | ● | |
| | Foster Care | | | | ● |
| | Adoption Assistance | | | | ● |
| | Assistance to Refugees and Cuban/Haitian Entrants | | | | ● |
| | Emergency Assistance | | | ● | |
| | Selected Compensation for Veterans | | | ● | |
| | General Assistance to Indians | | | | ● |
| Medical Care | Medicaid | ● | | | |
| | Medical Care for Certain Veterans | | | ● | |
| | Indian Health Services | | | ● | |
| | Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant | | ● | | |
| | Community Health Centers | | | ● | |
| | Title X Family Planning Services | | ● | | |
| | Migrant Health Centers | | | ● | |
| | Medical Assistance to Refugees | | | | ● |
| Food & Nutrition | Food Stamps | ● | | | |
| | School Lunch Program | | ● | | |
| | Special Supplemental Food Program | | | ● | |
| | School Breakfast Program | | ● | | |
| | Child and Adult Care Food Program | | | ● | |
| | Nutrition Program for the Elderly | | | | ● |
| | Emergency Food Assistance Program | | ● | | |
| | Summer Food Service Program for Children | | ● | | |
| | Commodity Supplemental Food Program | | | ● | |
| | Food Distribution on Indian Reservations | | | ● | |
| | Special Milk Program | | | | ● |
| Housing | Section 8 Low-Income Housing Assistance | | ● | | |
| | Low-Rent Public Housing | | ● | | |
| | Rural Housing Loans | | | ● | |
| | Section 236 Interest Reduction Payments | | ● | | |
| | Low-Income Home Energy Assistance | | ● | | |
| | Rural Rental Housing Loans | | | ● | |
| | Rural Rental Assistance | | | ● | |
| | Section 101 Rent Supplements | | ● | | |
| | Section 235 Homeownership | | ● | | |
| | Farm Labor Housing Loans and Grants | | | ● | |
| | Rural Housing Repair Loans and Grants | | | ● | |
| | Rural Housing Preservation Grants | | | ● | |
| | Indian Housing Improvement Grants | | | ● | |
| | Rural Self-Help Technical Assistance | | | ● | |
| | Home Investment Partnerships | | ● | | |
| | Homeownership and Opportunity for People | | ● | | |
| Education and Training | Education | | | | |
| | Stafford Loans | | | ● | |
| | Pell Grants | | | ● | |
| | Head Start | | | ● | |
| | College Work-Study Programs | | | ● | |
| | Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants | | | ● | |
| | Federal TRIO Programs | | | ● | |
| | Chapter 1 Migrant Education Program | | | ● | |
| | Perkins Loans | | | ● | |
| | State Student Incentive Grant Programs | | | ● | |
| | Fellowships for Graduate Study | | | ● | |
| | Health Professions Student Loans | | | ● | |
| | Follow Through | | | ● | |
| | Migrant High School Equivalency Program | | | ● | |
| | Ellender Fellowships | | | ● | |
| | College Assistance Migrant Program | | | ● | |
| | Child Development Associate Scholarships | | | ● | |
| | Training | | | | |
| | Training for Disadvantaged Adults and Youth | | ● | | |
| | Summer Youth Employment and Training | | | ● | |
| | Job Corps | | | ● | |
| | Job Opportunities and Basic Skills | | ● | | |
| | Senior Community Service Employment | | | | ● |
| | Foster Grandparents | | | | ● |
| | Senior Companions | | | | ● |
| Other Services | Social Services Block Grant | | | ● | |
| | Child Care and Development Block Grant | | | ● | |
| | AFDC Child Care | | | ● | |
| | At-Risk Child Care | | | | ● |
| | Community Services Block Grants | | ● | | |
| | Legal Services | | ● | | |
| | Emergency Food and Shelter Program | | ● | | |
| | Social Services for Refugees | | | ● | |



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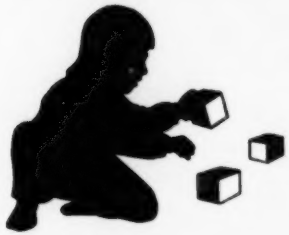
ATTACHMENT 4

# GAO Multiple Program Participation

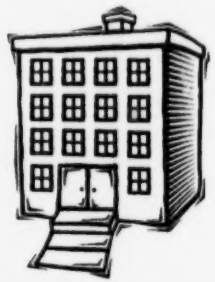


Child Care

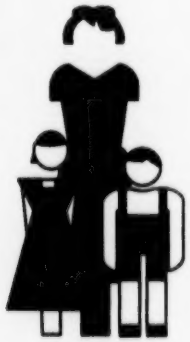
WIC

Social Services

School Lunch



Housing



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